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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 ADDIS ABABA 000018

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SO](#) [ET](#)  
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: PM MELES REPORTS TO PARLIAMENT ON  
SUCCESSFUL SOMALIA OPERATION

REF: ADDIS 3115

Classified By: A/DCM Kevin Sullivan for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: PM Meles told the Ethiopian Parliament Jan. 2 that Ethiopian military forces, along with TFG and Puntland militias, had defeated and dispersed Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) extremists. He highlighted the warm welcome and full cooperation Ethiopian forces had received from Somali clan elders and much of the Somali population. Meles said that the GOE's ability to distinguish between enemies and friends in Somali had been key to its success both in winning the conflict and in minimizing civilian casualties. Ethiopia planned to continue its pursuit of fleeing CIC leaders near Ras Kamboni in Somalia. The GOE had also succeeded on the diplomatic front, where the international community -- including the African Union and UNSC -- had largely accepted the rationale for Ethiopian intervention. Meles indicated that the GOE would work with the TFG to establish security in the coming weeks, but hoped to begin a military pullout from Somalia as soon as possible. The PM underscored the urgency of deploying an international peacekeeping mission to support stabilization. He minimized the CIC's prospects for successfully prosecuting a guerrilla insurgency without the support of clan elders. Ethiopian opposition leaders, most of whom had voted against authorizing the war, reacted cautiously to the speech but generally welcomed the military victory. Meles called the opposition's "no" votes "a historic mistake" but expressed willingness to continue engaging opposition leaders. He took pleasure in explaining the numerous ways in which dark predictions from international experts had been proven wrong. A resolution congratulating the Ethiopian military and the TFG, and thanking the international community for support, will be put to a vote on Jan. 4. COMMENT: The GOE's decisive military victory sends a strong message to those who believed confronting the CIC might be a fatal mistake for the EPRDF. The opposition's lukewarm reaction to the military victory reflects continuing distrust of the GOE, rather than sympathy for the CIC. End Summary.

12. (SBU) PM Meles Zenawi gave an upbeat report January 2 concerning the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) successful military intervention in Somalia. Nearly all MPs as well as many diplomats and media reps attended the session. The PM's report followed up on a Nov. 23 appearance before Parliament in which he had sought authorization to use "any means necessary" to counter the threat of the Council of

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REMOVING A THORN, CLEARING WAY FOR PEACE  
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13. (SBU) PM Meles told MPs that after exhausting all possibility of resolving the conflict with the CIC through negotiations, including last ditch attempts in Djibouti and Dubai in December, and after the CIC had initiated a two-front offensive against the TFG and Puntland authorities, the ENDF had launched a military counter-offensive against the CIC. Meles declared triumphantly that "we have routed the forces that stuck to our back like a thorn, removing it in good time (before it caused significant damage) with a proportional response. Our major aim was protecting ourselves, but we also envisioned supporting Somalis' desire for peace. In the end we made a decisive contribution and have created the best of opportunities for peace and stability in Somalia." The PM noted that the GOE had neither requested nor received any assistance from other governments for its operation.

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SOMALIS WELCOME ENDF TROOPS, AID IN REMOVING CIC  
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14. (SBU) One of the recurrent themes of Meles' remarks was that both Somali elders and ordinary people had welcomed the ENDF and TFG with open arms and had actually assisted in rooting out remaining CIC fighters and locating weapons caches. He explained that ENDF units had avoided entering towns in order to avoid civilian casualties and

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confrontations. Meles reported that clan-based militia had dispersed as soon as the defeat of the CIC became evident, and the ENDF had not pursued them. The Prime Minister emphasized that the key to Ethiopia's victory had been its reliance on information from allies in Somali, and the GOE's ability to distinguish friends from foes. Once isolated, then CIC's extremist leadership had fled, first to Mogadishu, then to Kismayo and eventually to the remote area around Ras Kamboni. The PM highlighted the efforts of Somali elders in facilitating the ouster of the CIC and the peaceful entry of TFG forces into key towns of Jowhar, Mogadishu and Kismayo. Although Ethiopian commanders had not intended to enter the Somali capital, a committee of 15 elders from Mogadishu insisted that ENDF/TFG forces enter the city in order to bring looting under control and reestablish public security. Elders from Kismayo had also met the ENDF outside the town in order to welcome and escort them peacefully into the urban area. In each case, elders and ENDF commanders had agreed on where ENDF troops would encamp. After pausing operations in honor of the Muslim holiday of Eid al Atah, the ENDF was now pursuing CIC extremists in the area of Ras Kamboni. The PM heartily congratulated and thanked the ENDF as well as the TFG militia for their successful campaign.

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AU, INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SUPPORTIVE  
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15. (SBU) Meles also highlighted the GOE's success on making the case for its intervention to the international community. He expressed particular appreciation to the African Union for its strong support of Ethiopia's right to self-defense. He argued that the AU's call for the ENDF to leave Somalia expeditiously was fully in accordance with the GOE's intentions. The PM noted that efforts at the UN to issue a PRST condemning Ethiopia's action had been defeated. Meles indicated that the GOE had sent two separate diplomatic missions to Arab Gulf states to explain Ethiopia's intentions. The one major exception to the general support for Ethiopia in the international community was Eritrea. When questioned subsequently about support from the United

States for the intervention in Somalia, Meles replied that a senior US military officer (note: referring to CENTCOM Commander Gen. Abizaid) had visited Addis shortly before the operation commenced and warned that entering a quagmire in Somali could divide Ethiopians. The PM added that no foreign government had told the GOE to "go and fight," and none had offered a penny to support the operation.

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PUNDITS GOT IT ALL WRONG  
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¶16. (SBU) Meles took considerable pleasure in pointing out a number of key areas where the predictions of international "experts" on Somalia had proven to be wrong. Among the mistaken assumptions he cited were that Somalia would prove to be a "quagmire" for the ENDF, and that Somalis were by nature "blood enemies" of Ethiopians and would fiercely resist any Ethiopian incursion. Many analysts believed that two previous wars between Somalia and Ethiopia had been between the respective peoples, when in fact they were conflicts between the respective governments. In fact, Meles said, events had shown that Ethiopians and Somalis were brothers who shared important bonds. In addition, Ethiopians of Somali descent had already been given a right to self-determination and most were willing to fight alongside their fellow Ethiopians against the CIC.

¶17. (SBU) Another fallacy promoted by international pundits was that the CIC had achieved widespread popular support and was therefore invincible. According to Meles, these experts had failed to see that following their successful efforts to establish improved security in Mogadishu, the CIC extremists had imposed Taliban-like rules that alienated the population. Furthermore, the CIC did not adequately represent the broader clan structure in Somalia society. As a result, the CIC collapsed even faster than it rose to power. Experts had also sought to pit "Christian Ethiopia" against "Muslim Somalia," overlooking the fact that the ENDF, like Ethiopia, was made up of Muslims as well as Christians. The real war,

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Meles said, was between those who espoused extremism and those who believed in religious tolerance. The PM declared proudly that the military campaign had "broken the back of the extremists."

¶18. (SBU) The final misperception that Meles highlighted was the belief that "war would consume the Horn of Africa" if Ethiopia intervened in Somalia. The key assumption of this assessment, the PM said, was that Eritrea would join the fight once the GOE was engaged with the CIC. In fact, Meles said, the Eritrean government was only prepared to fight "until the last drop of Somali blood." Even when Eritrea's own troops were routed and forced to flee, the GSE had not lifted a finger to help them. Most Somalis, for their part, were not prepared to fight to realize the GSE's objective of destabilizing Ethiopia.

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ENDF HOPES TO WITHDRAW WITHIN WEEKS  
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¶10. (SBU) While trumpeting Ethiopian military successes, Meles admitted that "durable peace has not yet been achieved" and that the threat of suicide terrorist attacks remained. Meles pledged to keep a close watch on the "forces of destruction," since peace in Somalia could only be achieved when Somalis negotiated among themselves without foreign interference. Nonetheless, the PM made clear that the ENDF could not stay in Somalia for the long-term, primarily due to resource constraints. He hoped that Ethiopian forces could be withdrawn within a few weeks, but made clear that he would not allow a gap in guaranteeing security. "We will not let the hyenas eat" the TFG, he said. The GOE would assist the TFG in steadily increasing its capacity to establish

effective control in the areas it had taken over, and would continue to provide training to TFG forces even after withdrawing ENDF combat forces. Meles also called for the deployment of a peacekeeping force consistent with UN and AU resolutions as well as the provision of international humanitarian assistance in Somalia. He said Ethiopia could carry an "appropriate burden," but that others with more resources were also concerned about the future of Somalia. He also noted the upcoming visits of Ugandan President Museveni and "a senior US official responsible for Africa" (note: referring to A/S Frazer).

¶11. (SBU) Meles downplayed the risk of a widespread CIC insurgency, saying that guerrilla warfare in Somalia is only possible if clan leaders supported it. The TFG's job is win support from clan elders for its agenda. This was essentially a political issue, rather than military. The PM pledged not to interfere in negotiations over key government posts, nor those over the status of Somaliland or Puntland. The GOE would offer no directives, just support for the process.

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MIXED REACTION AMONG OPPOSITION LEADERS  
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¶12. (C) Ethiopian opposition leaders generally voted against or abstained on the ruling party's November resolution authorizing the use of any means necessary against the CIC. During the January 2 session, most found themselves in the uncomfortable position of welcoming the military victory against extremists without giving too much credit to the GOE. Beyene Petros of the UEDF had the most difficulty, admitting that "many would think we made a mistake on the Somali issue." He claimed he had never doubted the ENDF's capability and was relieved by the campaign's outcome, but predicted that the CIC would not give up its efforts. He, along with other opposition leaders, asked for an accounting of "the price paid in money and lives" for the victory. Temesgen Zewde of the CUDP was more positive, expressing great happiness at the ENDF's military success and recognizing that the dangers he feared had not materialized. He urged the GOE to bring troops home as soon as possible and fully engage the international community, since "terrorism cannot be fought alone" by Ethiopia. Bulcha Demeksa of the Oromo-based OFDM asked the PM pointedly whether any hard evidence had been uncovered that the Oromo Liberation Front

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(OLF) and Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) had really been fighting alongside the CIC. PM Meles subsequently replied that both ONLF and OLF had fought the ENDF in Bendayle, near Puntland. Some of these insurgents had been killed, while others were fleeing toward Ras Kamboni with the CIC leadership. Some ONLF fighters had simply blended back into the Somali population.

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MELES: OPPOSITION TO WAR "A HISTORIC MISTAKE"  
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¶13. (SBU) Though he had held his fire in his initial presentation, PM Meles called the opposition's failure to support the November resolution on Somalia "a historic mistake." Recalling opposition leaders' refusal to accept language referring to the OLF and ONLF in the resolution, he criticized their failure to defend Ethiopia's constitutional order while taking advantage of its freedoms. Nonetheless, he took a considerably more conciliatory line than other ruling party MPs who chided opposition leaders for welcoming the military victory they would not support beforehand. "We are happy to celebrate our victory together with them," he concluded, and added that he would continue engaging with opposition leaders despite their lack of support on Somalia. He urged opposition parties to learn from their mistakes, which he said was the true measure of any organization.

¶14. (SBU) The ruling coalition introduced a new resolution to express appreciation and congratulations to the ENDF and the TFG militia for their successful campaign, thank the international community for its support and reiterate key Ethiopian positions with respect to Somalia contained in the PM's report. Opposition MPs objected, however, arguing that they had no opportunity to review the resolution prior to the session. PM Meles agreed to postpone the vote until Jan. 4 to permit a more thorough review.

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THE "AWEYS" IN ASMARA MISCALCULATES AGAIN  
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¶15. (SBU) A ruling party MP asked the PM what should be done about Eritrea's ceaseless efforts to destabilize Ethiopia, which appeared to be "the source of all our problems." Meles replied that the people of Eritrea were not enemies of Ethiopia. Even Eritrea's armed forces were not really enemies, but rather had no choice but to follow orders. The problem in Eritrea was simply the "Aweys-like figure" in Asmara (note: referring to President Isaias.) Meles said that the GSE plan was to use Somalia to weaken Ethiopia "to the point of death, then strike the final blow." He added that elements of the leadership of the CUD, the OLF and others cooperated in this effort, which was ultimately unsuccessful. Meles remarked that the Eritrean government had been prone to miscalculations, and this was simply one more. He nonetheless promised to continue the "search for peace through dialogue" with the GSE.

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COMMENT: TRIUMPHANT MELES BATTLES DISTRUST AT HOME  
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¶16. (C) The GOE's decisive military victory in Somalia sends a strong message for those, both inside and outside Ethiopia, who believed that confronting the CIC might reveal be a fatal mistake for the EPRDF. In spite of continuing doubts about morale and loyalty in the ENDF, the ruling party was able to direct a successful military campaign against a determined adversary. Meles used the Parliamentary session to drive home this message to Eritrean President Isaias as well as to opposition leaders in the Diaspora, while showing somewhat more magnanimity to opponents in Parliament. He also sought to dispel any concerns in the international community that Ethiopia intended to stay indefinitely in Somalia.

¶17. (C) While domestic opposition parties have no sympathy for religious extremists in Somalia, they also do not wish to position themselves too close to the ruling party. They suspect that the GOE was using its war in Somalia to justify a broader military campaign against domestic insurgencies

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like the OLF and ONLF, whom most government opponents believe must be brought into the political system through negotiations. Opposition leaders are also responding to public opinion in Ethiopia, where widespread distrust of the GOE encourages many to believe that PM Meles undertook operations in Somalia to win continued political support from the United States.  
WILGUS